

[Mrs. W. H. Downing]

Dulaney, Ethel C., [Wich?] Falls, Texas

8/19/'38 49 Wichita County

REMINISCENCES OF MRS. W.H. DOWNING

Mrs. Downing is one of Wichita Falls' lovable pioneer citizens. She has spent practically her entire life here; and is one of the oldest members in point of service in the First Methodist Church. Her "Reminiscences" are on file at Kemp Public Library.

"I came here in 1884, starting from [Fort?] Sill, where I had been for three or four years. My father worked for the government saddle and harness shop there. We started in a government Red Cross wagon. We were with a crowd of people coming this way. We could not get across the ferry so we stayed all night at Grogan's. They took us on to Henrietta the next day, and we came on the train to Wichita Falls. My father worked in the harness shop of John and Henry Stockett on Ohio Avenue. The first man I spoke to was Ike Marcus. - -Mr. J.A. Kemp had a little general merchandise store in a red brick building on Ohio Avenue. We lived in a little log house on Ohio several blocks south of the stores.

"I used to see the cowboys ride through and shoot up the town, but they didn't mean any harm; they were just having a good time.

"At that time there was just one Sunday school, and it was a Union chool school . Judge Barwise was superintendent. Miss Lula Barwise played the organ.____ [?] - 12. Tex.

"When school started in September. [?] We met in the little building that stood where the Masonic Temple now stands. - - - As the school grew, the authorities put up another, until there were several little separate rooms on the lot.

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"In September they had the first annual picnic. Barbecued beef, ickles pickles , and light bread were served to all who came. The picnic was held on the old Williams place out on Holliday Creek. Lots of people came from nearby towns. Many of them did not come prepared to pay hack fare from 2 the depot to the picnic grounds, and they had to walk out throught the deep sand. There were no side walks anywhere and the sand was several inches deep in the roads in some places. Hundreds of Indians came and that night they got together out at the Knott Barn on the hill and had a War Dance.

"Old man Gilbert from Gilbert Creek neighborhood used to bring milk and deliver to every one who wanted it. He had chain harness instead of leather on his old horse, and we could always hear him coming. We just hung our bucket on the fence and when he came along he just measured a quart of milk and poured into it. He was a very kind hearted old man. One time a widow woman was about to stop taking mild milk because hse she could not pay for it; he found it out and brought the milk without pay.

"My husband, Mr. W.H. Downing, came here in 1885, and he and his brother and a man maned Dud Hart started the first uursery nursery in this part of the country. They bought a piece of land just north of the river where they grew their nursery stock. The drought came in 1886, and they did not make anything. Their former employer at Terrell, Texas, offered them their jobs if they would come back, but the they refused. During that year carloads of flour were sent in to the drouth suffers, but they did not accept any help.

"In 1889 Mr. Downing and I were married. - - -

"The rains came and times got better, and the Downing Brothers' Nursery began to be a going concern. They bought more land south of town known as the Keen place, where the Cedar Park Pool now is located. Mr. Downing had the first green house in Wichita Falls on our little home place north of the river, and people drove out from town in their buggies after flowers. 3 "In 1904 we had a terribel terrible sand storm. Mr. Downing was plowing in the field, and the wind became so strong that it blew him out of the row, so he quit and

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came in. here There were other bad sand storms in those early days; sometimes we could not see the buildings across the street. One storm lasted for three days and nights.

“Mr. Downing and his brother had a wind mill on their farm south of town, and did some irrigating on a small scale, and raised all kinds of vegetables for the market. Later when water was available from the Wichita Lake, they knew how to use it and had irrigated gardens all the time. Later Mr. Downing sold out the nursery business to his brother, and he spent his time raising strawberries, tomatoes, green peppers, etc. for the wholesale produce market. One wholesale wholesaler dubbed him 'The Pepper King', for he seemed to be the only man around here who could grow sweet peppers. Each spring he raised early vegetable plants and sold them all over this vicinity.

“Mr. Downing and my mother, Mrs. Bettie Gentry, organized a little Sunday school across the river in 1891. Mother went out and collected money and built a little house, which had two rooms and an L. It was made a mission Sunday school——later abandoned when so many people moved away from that side of town.

“Mr. Downing was very active in the work of the Methodist church, and was Superintendent of the Sunday school for sixteen consecutive years. He was one of the earliest stewards of the church, and at the time of his death in 1926 he was the oldest steward in point of service and in point of age.

“I have been a member of the Methodist church here for forty-nine years, having joined in August., 1885.